

It's "Back to School" time: How to support employees who have school age kids at home.

As we head into month 6 of the COVID pandemic, many parents are starting the school year already worn out, after months of "go go go" from the time the kids wake up at 6am until their bedtime at 9pm (and sometimes the kids are up in the middle of the night too.) They're likely wondering how they and their families will manage, and they're not alone. [Recent research by the Kaiser Family Foundation](#) warns that nearly half of all parents of school age kids are worried that they will not be able to pay enough attention to their child if they are working from home. In addition, more than half of all parents of K-12 kids experienced one or more adverse health effects due to worry and stress from COVID, with 69% of mothers and 51% of fathers.

How can you support your employees through this time?

- 1) **Be kind, caring and flexible.** The State Human Resources division counsels agencies to operate with principles such as: maximum flexibility, action not perfection ("Try something. Take a risk and you can make adjustments if it doesn't work.") and strong support for "accommodating parents and other caregivers to make it possible for them to remain in the workforce and thrive..." See [Supporting Working Parents and Caregivers](#), part of the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) HR Guidance for State Agencies](#).
- 2) **Provide maximum flexibility for employees to get their work done.** Given each employee's unique situation, ask when they can work. It can be a patchwork quilt, such as working: before the kids are up, after they're in bed, on weekends, and when their partner is "on duty." The [new State HR guidance](#) describes these and other possible work schedule options to accommodate the employee's caregiving responsibilities.
- 3) **Be proactive** – check in with your employees who are parenting school age kids about their back-to-school plans. While asking all school-age parents is important, pay special attention to mothers, given research showing that [they are bearing the brunt of juggling home schooling and working](#) and report suffering [more adverse health effects](#) than fathers. During these tough economic times or due to past negative experience, employees may be reluctant to expose anything they fear their supervisor or HR may see as a failure to perform their work. Don't wait until your employees approach you to seek help or relief – they may wait too long.
- 4) **Check in regularly** with your employees to see how they're doing, and reassure them that you are open to adjusting and adapting as their family's needs change.
- 5) **Encourage your employees to use their leave and take regular time off from work.** During this stressful time, taking some time away from work is vital to your employees' and their families' continued wellbeing. In addition to vacation and sick time your employees may qualify for other leave categories, including the 2020 federal COVID-related leave – [here's the description of federal COVID-related leave](#). For information specific to your organization talk with your HR staff.
- 6) **Urge your employees to make their self-care a priority.** Here is some specific [self-care information and guidance tailored to parents](#). In addition, the EAP offers both a [Self-Care webinar](#) and a [Parenting through COVID webinar](#) as well as other resources that can help on their [COVID-19 Resources page](#).

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Here are some additional resources to help you be a better leader during this time:

- If you don't currently have school age kids, it may be difficult to imagine what your employees who are parents are facing. You can gain some understanding of your employees' struggles by watching this 14 minute [video about how to work from home with kids](#).
- Has asking your employees some version of "how are you?" gotten old but you're not sure what other questions to ask? Here's a quick read: "[How to Stop Asking 'How are you?' and Create Real Connection](#)"
- Wondering how to express caring and empathy (but afraid to ask?) Here is some quick guidance on expressing empathy: [author \("Dare to Lead"\) Brene Brown's 2 minute take](#) and [author \("Find Your Why"\) Simon Sinek's 20 minute dive](#).

Finally, don't hesitate to reach out to the EAP for support, guidance, tools and resources to help with your specific situation, at 1-877-313-4455 or [online](#).

Become a Better Leader by Learning How to "Coach with Compassion"

A [recent Greater Good Science Center article](#) describes the power and effectiveness of "coaching with compassion" especially in these times of volatility, uncertainty and distress. The authors state that under our current circumstances it would be understandable for managers to "...cling to the status quo, urging people to stick to deadlines, assigned tasks, and as-normal-as-possible routines. But that would be a mistake". Here's why: their [research suggests](#) that the traditional method of "coaching for compliance" typically causes the "fight/flight/freeze" stress response, naturally resulting in employee defensiveness and cognitive and emotional shut down. In contrast, coaching with compassion leads to an increase in the employee's confidence, hopefulness and openness to learning new ideas as well as improving the manager/employee relationship. The 6 step "coaching with compassion" model uses the acronym "REACH": **R**esonance, **E**mpathy, **A**wareness (of yourself and others), **C**ompassion, **H**ope and **H**umor. In addition to [reading the article](#), you can learn more by checking out the authors' free Coursera course, [Conversations That Inspire: Coaching Learning, Leadership and Change](#).

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